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The writing on the wall: the concealed communities of the East Yorkshire horselads

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Abstract (50-100 words)

This paper examines the graffiti found within late nineteenth and early-twentieth century farm buildings in the Wolds of East Yorkshire. It suggests that the graffiti were created by a group of young men at the bottom of the social hierarchy - the horselads – and was one of the ways in which they constructed a distinctive sense of communal identity, at a particular stage in their lives. Whilst it tells us much about changing agricultural regimes and social structures, it also informs us about experiences and attitudes often hidden from official histories and biographies. In this way, the graffiti are argued to inform our understanding, not only of a concealed community, but also about their hidden history.

Keywords: Graffiti, Identity, Farm buildings, Horselads

The writing on the wall: inscribing identity, constructing communities in the Yorkshire Wolds

1. Introduction

Traditionally, buildings have been seen as a rich source of information on working communities in historic England. Whilst many recent studies have focused on the industrial landscape of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, this paper will instead explore the farming households and agricultural communities of the Yorkshire Wolds, during this period. Although it will touch on aspects of ownership and management, agricultural regimes and the composition of labour, our paper is explicitly interested in aspects of life normally concealed from view. These are the experiences, views and concerns of men at the bottom of the social hierarchy: the 'horselads' who were responsible for ploughing and cultivating the land. The archaeological evidence we will draw upon is a hitherto neglected area of practice: the carving, inscribing and incising of graffiti, found in barns and outbuildings of the High Wolds farms.

We will argue that an archaeological approach has the potential to set the graffiti within a wider social and historical context, through an analysis of its location, character and content. From preliminary fieldwork results, it is evident that there is an underlying stratigraphy to the images and texts, which can help reveal date, purpose and authorship. We will examine its active role in structuring and negotiating status, as well as gender and age within these groups. We will also explore the graffiti as a record of aspects of life otherwise

unrecorded in both official historical records and the impressive oral history archives which exist for the region. These include the day-to-day experiences of working life, seasonality, friendship, humour and sex, as well as the intersection of local concerns with global processes, through events such as the two World Wars, changes in working patterns and gender relations, and the impact of mechanisation.

2. Historiography of buildings archaeology

Although farm buildings are one of the most visible aspects of the historic environment, in many ways they are still a rather marginalised element of historical archaeology in the UK. Post-1750 farmsteads receive only brief consideration in two recent major syntheses of post-medieval archaeology (Crossley 1990: 44-7, Newman 2001: 127-9) and few articles on the archaeology of farm buildings are published in mainstream English journals, such as *Post-Medieval Archaeology*. Instead, studies of farm buildings tend to be found in vernacular studies, agricultural and landscape history, in specialist journals such as that of the *Historic Farm Buildings Group*, and in local and regional journals. In many ways this marginality is a function of the traditional preoccupation of post-medieval archaeology with artefact studies and the processes of industrial, rather than agricultural, revolution. It is also a product of the relatively recent extension of the chronological remits of the discipline in the UK, into the nineteenth twentieth centuries. However, it also reflects the fact that until relatively recently, farm buildings have been considered part of the continuum of the working landscape, rather than part of the heritage resource. As Harvey (1987) has noted, it was only during the latter part of the

twentieth century that the systematic recording and investigation of the history of farm buildings really commenced (Chapman 1967, Brunskill 1976).

More recently, ongoing changes within the industry have encouraged farmers and heritage professionals to consider the significance and future of farm buildings in the face of decay, loss and conversion for re-use (Brunskill 1999, Historic Farm Buildings Group 2002). Concern about the relative lack of understanding of such structures has prompted an audit and evaluation of the resource (Barnwell 1998, English Heritage 2002, 2004-5, Gaskell 2002). It has also led to the production of important syntheses (Wade Martins 1981, Lake 1989, Brunskill 1999) and thematic surveys of farmsteads 1750-1914 (Barnwell and Giles 1997) and model farms (Wade Martins 2002). Most recently, the potential for farm buildings to inform the process of landscape characterisation has also been recognised (English Heritage 2004-5).

In general, farm buildings are understood as ‘structural documents’ shedding important light on the agricultural processes which they were designed and adapted to contain (Harvey 1984, 1985, 1987). In particular, scholars have been interested in the ways in which farm buildings reflect the regional and chronological development and diffusion of the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and of ‘high farming’ practices (Barnwell and Giles 1997). A much more subtle and nuanced understanding of landscape change is also emerging from these studies, allowing archaeologists to question the relationship between farmsteads and processes of enclosure and settlement shift (Williamson 2002). Significantly, it

is now acknowledged that the potential of farm buildings to do this extends beyond the agricultural depression of the 1880s and into the twentieth century, revealing evidence of the regional and chronological impact of decline, the two world wars and mechanisation (Wade Martins 1987, Edwards 1991, Williamson 2002).

Whilst the study of farm buildings therefore appears to be moving out of a hitherto rather marginalised position within British historical archaeology, its underlying theoretical agendas and research questions remain quite traditional. Emphasis has tended to be placed on the evidence for agricultural or industrial change in the buildings of the farmstead – the barns, fold-yards, cowsheds and milking parlours – rather than on the farmhouses or cottages of those who worked within these complexes, which tend to be considered separately, and within the context of vernacular, domestic buildings (Barley 1961, Mercer 1975, Brown 1982). Such an approach is facilitated by the fact that in many regions and on many farms, farmhouses and workers cottages were located at some distance from buildings associated with agricultural activity. Yet as we shall see below, some nominally agricultural buildings could also be used as spaces in which particular communities met and socialised.

In industrial archaeology there is an increasing awareness that a more integrated approach to workers houses *and* factories sheds important light on the material conditions through which particular kinds of community were constructed and reproduced over time (Palmer and Nevearson 2005) and

Alfrey (2001) has demonstrated the potential of this approach to farms in Carmarthenshire (Wales). The remainder of this paper seeks to explore the potential of such an integrated approach to landscape, buildings and material culture in the case study of farm graffiti of the Yorkshire Wolds.

3. The Yorkshire Wolds

The agricultural context

The focus of this study is the late nineteenth and early twentieth century landscape of East Yorkshire, particularly the north-western area known as the 'High Wolds' (fig. 1). The Yorkshire Wolds comprise an elevated ridge of chalk, rising from the river Humber and curving in a crescentic arc to outcrop at Flamborough Head. In the north-west corner of this outcrop, broad, swelling peneplains are dissected by a series of deep, 'v-shaped' dry valleys or dales. However, as the chalk dipslope descends eastwards towards the Hull Valley and Holderness Plain, the landscape is characterised by more shallow valleys known locally as 'slacks'. To the north, the Wolds are flanked by the Vale of Pickering, and to the west, by the Vale of York. This elevated area of chalkland, characterised by thin, light loam soils and fed by springs and small streams, is therefore surrounded by lower-lying, wetter land which has been improved from the medieval period onwards, by extensive drainage.

During the medieval period, when the landscape had been largely cleared, the Wolds were used extensively for sheep pasture and rabbit warrens, with arable on the lower slopes around nucleated settlements (Harris 1960, 1961). However, from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, there was

mounting pressure to increase arable activity on the Wolds at the expense of permanent pasture: a movement described by contemporaries as ‘a rage of plowing’ (Harris 1996). Initially, these changes were part of the discourse of landscape improvement (Young 1770, Marshall 1788, Strickland 1812), but they were also stimulated by historical events such as the Napoleonic wars, and a rising demand for grain. This led to the relatively late agricultural colonisation of the Wolds, resulting in a landscape pattern of isolated farmsteads (Harris 1961: 98-9).

The soils which once covered the chalk were denuded by post-glacial weathering, prehistoric clearance and cultivation, and later erosion. Steep valley sides restricted the areas available for cultivation, and increased soil mobility (Foster 1987). In general, Wold soils contained a high proportion of chalk and flint inclusions (Gatenby 1948), and isolated patches of clay with flints hindered pre-modern ploughing and drainage. The thin soils on which crops were being grown required both frequent manuring and marling, since the leaching of chalk quickly created acidic growing conditions. Crop rotation schemes were devised to maintain the fertility of the soil, in which both sheep and cattle played a vital role as producers of manure (Caunce 1991a: 11). However, stocking regimes on the High Wolds were also limited by the amount of fresh water available in the rare dolines, upland ponds or small meres, until the widespread creation of dewponds in the historic period (Best 1930, Harris 1996, Hayfield and Brough 1987, Hayfield and Wagner 1995). The results were variable and concern for the fertility of the land was

frequently expressed. One of the major consequences was an expansion in the amount of labour required to work the land.

The social structure of farming households

Between 1770 and 1850, following enclosure, the solution for many of these problems lay either in the expansion of existing farms, or the creation of new ones, especially in more isolated areas of the High Wolds (Hayfield 1998). These buildings must be understood in the context of a national interest in the improvement of the design of farmsteads and their infrastructure, manifested in the Royal Agricultural Society competition of 1850 (Brigden 2000: 498) and the Yorkshire Agricultural Society publication of 1862 (YAS 1862).

Tied to major farmhouses and estate centres through tenancy agreements, these farms created permanent communities of both agricultural labour and horsepower, with cattle over-wintered around a central foldyard to create a steady supply of manure for the surrounding fields. In effect, these farms were manure factories, enabling larger areas of land to be fertilised and ploughed, than had previously been possible (Caunce 1991a, Hayfield 1991). They were run by tenant farmers or 'hinds', who increasingly took over the day-to-day organisation of farming and rotas of work. New buildings were constructed of brick, at least on the exterior walls (rather than the vernacular chalk clunch), and roofed with pantiles. By the late nineteenth century slate roofs were increasingly common (Hayfield 1998: 109-10). As profits increased, so did investment in the main farm houses, many of which were remodelled or had their interiors redesigned (Hayfield 1994). The use of more expensive

materials set them apart from the more spartan ‘Hind’s House’ (fig. 2), but together, the farm complex became a symbol of wealth and status, as well as improvement and modernisation.

Farmhouses, hind houses, granaries, barns, stables and sheds both reproduced and represented the social structure of these small agricultural communities. Whilst there was considerable variation from farm to farm, the day-to-day running of things was organised by the hind, whose wife was responsible for boarding and feeding the ‘horselads’: the men who worked with the Shire and Clydesdale teams, to plough and cultivate the land (fig. 3), (Brown 1991). They were hired at Martinmas (November 23rd), on an annual basis, and were described as being ‘meated in’ – provided with bed and board, and paid at the year-end. This system required the provision of separate sleeping accommodation (perhaps over a granary) and frequently a warming or rest room, often referred to as a ‘slum’ or ‘t’kip’ (Neave 1971, Caunce 1991a: 163). However, most of the hired men originally ate in the main kitchen alongside the farmer and his family.

East Yorkshire and parts of neighbouring counties shared this system, which differed subtly from other northern traditions of ‘living-in’ (Thirsk 1981, Caunce 1991b, Howkins 2000: 1315-1317). Importantly, in the Wolds, the separation of the unmarried horselads from the farmer and other labourers, mitigated against the kind of patriarchal relationship created elsewhere. As a result, the horselads formed a distinctive, close-knit community which developed its own identity, hierarchy and culture, which Howkins (2000: 1390) has described as

looking ‘very like a modern youth subculture’. The horselads began their careers around the age of fourteen, and aimed to move jobs or positions on farms on an annual basis, working their way up towards the respected post of ‘waggoner’ by their early-mid twenties. More rarely, if they gained sufficient experience, capital and a wife, they might aspire to the position of ‘hind’. Unlike other regions, where labourers began and ended their careers working with horses, on the Wolds, this was seen as a particular stage in men’s lives (Dewey 2000: 812). The horselads were defined by their distinctive dress, particularly at the hiring fairs, where they could be recognised by their gaudy neckties, moleskin jackets, sometimes fastened by a length of chain, corduroy trousers slit up at the bottoms and decorated with rows of ‘pearlies’ (Caunce 1991: 71, Howkins and Merricks 1991: 196). The less elaborate, but nonetheless distinctive version of this get-up is depicted in one drawing from Wharram Percy (fig. 4).

In addition to the horselads, one or more young female servants were kept to assist the hind’s wife, as well as a beast-man or ‘bullocky’ (to care for the cattle) and shepherd. Separate accommodation was provided in-house for the former, and adjacent cottages or caravans for the latter. Extra hands were also required for harvest and threshing periods, and included seasonal labourers from Ireland as well as the North York Moors (Gatenby 1948, Perkins 1976), alongside the itinerant workforce of vagrants and tramps, known locally as ‘Wold Rangers’ (Antrim 1981).

Social divisions were reinforced and reiterated by the way in which these groups inhabited and used these spaces (Hayfield 1994: 22). A good example of this is provided at Red House farm, Wharram le Street, where plans dated to 1863 show how the farmer's intention to create two units joined by a 'cooking kitchen', separated his family from that of the hind and the hired hands. Notably, by this date, the farmer enjoyed the privacy of a separate dining room. At Vessey Pastures, the remodelling of the main farmhouse in the 1840s similarly created two sides, in which the hired men were confined to the east wing, with a dormitory over their own kitchen, located next to the granary and overlooking the foldyard. Interestingly, the female servants' accommodation was relocated to the attic, which was only accessible via the main stairway past the master's sitting room and bedroom. The seasonal labourers on many farms were accommodated either in makeshift beds in barns or separate slum houses, as at Burdale. Class, gender, age and even ethnic relations were carefully proscribed by the use of different routes of access, sleeping, eating and washing facilities.

The archaeological potential of the High Wolds farms

The archaeology of the farm buildings on the High Wolds therefore has great potential to reveal the ways in which social organisation was transformed over time, and relationships renegotiated. Notably, although the agricultural depression of the 1880s did have an impact on the region, 'high farming' traditions continued well into the early twentieth century (Brassley 2000: 458). However, since the end of the Second World War, and the advent of mechanisation, the composition of these farming communities has radically

altered (Gatenby 1948). With the loss of horses to the front during the First World War, and their replacement with tractors, alongside the growth of artificial fertilizers and manures, the horselads gradually disappeared as a distinct workforce. As the number of labourers dwindled on each farm and travel became easier, labourers preferred to reside in the villages, removing the need for the system of 'meating-in'. As a result, from the 1950s onwards, small farms and hind houses often became the family residence of a single tenant farmer or tractor driver (Hayfield 1988, 1998: 122). In the last decade, fluctuating agricultural subsides, changes in government policy and farming incentives, and the move towards diversification, have also taken their toll on these buildings. This is particularly true of the ancillary structures which no longer serve their original purpose, and which are, ironically, the main locations for the historic graffiti. Since the graffiti are commonly drawn onto whitewashed plaster, this is particularly vulnerable to wind and rain. Demolition is increasingly common where the state of these structures pose a serious threat to employees, livestock or even walkers using the extensive network of footpaths along the Wolds' Way. The traces of these ways of life are therefore being lost, partly because they are not regarded as of sufficient architectural or historical merit to warrant preservation, and partly because the communities who once inhabited them have long since disappeared.

4. Aims and Methods

Oral history

The region is particularly rich in both documentary evidence and oral histories. For example, there are a series of colourful biographies which shed light on

the period, including Herbert Day's *When Horses Were Supreme* (1985), Irene Megginson's *Mud on my Doorstep* (1987) and Harry Reffold's *Pie for Breakfast* (1984). In addition, numerous oral testimonies by horselads were collected by Stephen Caunce in his masterful work *Amongst Farm Horses* (1991a): the oral archive of which is held at the Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, at the University of Sheffield. In addition, there are numerous local studies which evoke the character of this landscape and its communities, during the period.

However, we believe the graffiti offer a unique insight into a class of workers who are normally absent from official histories: forgotten participants and agents in agricultural transformation. Whilst they may be present in contemporary black and white photographs (see fig. 3) (cf Hayfield 1988 and Caunce 1991a), they were seldom given voice in documents of the time. Although the oral histories and autobiographies redress this imbalance, we must acknowledge that these are the reflections of men at the end of their working lives, often looking back on an era with nostalgia for lost ways of life. Whilst some are honest about the hardships they endured, the graffiti give us a glimpse of these men at the beginning of their careers, facing the concerns and uncertainties of young men… entering adulthood, learning on the job, beginning to court young women, and facing crises beyond their control, such as the two World Wars or the unemployment heralded by the beginning of large-scale mechanisation. These men did not keep diaries, and seldom wrote letters, during their youth. The graffiti allow us to eavesdrop on their immediate responses to life's experiences, literally at the barn door.

Case studies

This research was initiated through the work of Dr Colin Hayfield, as part of the Wharram Landscape Project. From 1989, it has systematically recorded the buildings and infrastructure of a series of High Wolds farms, based on the Birdsall Estate. Through the kind permission of the Estate, these surveys have been complemented by the selective recording of their interiors, on which graffiti have been identified. Since 2002, inscribed graffiti at the farms of Foxhouse, Wharram Percy and Burdale has been recorded. In addition to buildings on the Birdsall Esate, a contrasting example of carved graffiti has been recorded at Towthorpe farm. Although part of our argument is that the graffiti are the product of a particular community, at a specific historic moment, we suspect that there are other examples of contemporary date, elsewhere in Britain and would encourage buildings archaeologists to be alert to its presence and proactive in its recording.

Methodology

The recording methodology we have selected for this pilot study consists of three levels of recording. REDM surveys of the buildings are being used to produce scale ground plans, in which the precise location of graffiti is noted, in relation to architectural features such as doorways, stairs and windows. A full photographic record in both colour and black-and-white, is made of both wall panels and individual details, providing an illustrated catalogue. Finally, since some of the text is very faint, a transcription of each panel, with selective tracing, is made by hand, to complement the photographic record. This final

stage is vital, since it encourages translation and interpretation in the field rather than being deferred to a later stage. As a result, important inter-relationships between images and text can be noted as part of the recording process.

Finally, in our interpretations, we have sought to consider the wider historical and sociological understanding of graffiti as a medium of cultural expression. It is important to recognise that modern perceptions of graffiti, as counter-normative or 'deviant' behaviour, were not always prevalent in the past (Reisner 1971, Abel and Buckley 1977). Rather, graffiti in the Classical, medieval and early modern periods, where it has received most study, can be thought of as a form of 'writing art'; a means of presencing the individual within a particular locale, at a particular moment in time (Jones-Baker 1993, Fleming 2001, Plesch 2002). Nevertheless, studies of modern graffiti are also of relevance. Such studies emphasise that rather than being a reflection of cultural norms, graffiti often plays an important function in the covert expression of proscribed values or views (Gonos et al. 1976). These studies also emphasise its role in the construction of identity, particularly that of young men in urban communities (MacDonald 2002), or rural groups of workers (Mallea-Olaetxe 2000) and that group presence often mitigates against intervention in the process of its creation (Chekroun and Brauer 2002). Moreover, such studies have shown that the context of graffiti is often modified according to the specialised function of the buildings or structures on which it is inscribed (Landy and Steele. 1967). There is, undoubtedly, considerable potential for archaeologists to engage more critically with the

study of this form of material expression. The recently-published volume on military war art also makes an important contribution to this debate (Cocroft et al. 2006).

5. Results

The location and character of the graffiti

Of the four case studies, graffiti have been identified in first floor granaries (at Foxhouse and Burdale), a room over a wagon shed (at Wharram Percy) and a stable tack room (at Towthorpe). The specialised functions of these buildings and the role of the horselads who occupied them, are manifest in the content of the graffiti. The graffiti tend to cluster around features such as doors and windows, as if the men were gathered around these openings (fig. 5). The graffiti may therefore have been made by the horselads during their breaks or leisure time, or whilst taking shelter in periods of bad weather.

This interpretation is also informed by the content of many of the written remarks, such as these three examples from Foxhouse, which suggest the men taking shelter were frustrated by poor weather, especially at harvest and threshing time:

'Threshing no good'

'This was the waterline on the stooks',

'up to ankles in wet, been weeks rain'

The oral histories augment the graffiti with more painful detail: Kitchen (in Caunce 1991a: 86-7) recalls the physical discomfort of permanently wet feet, and the split and raw chilblained hands which were hidden under the table on visits home. Sometimes the comments refer to more extreme weather: we were for some time puzzled by the comments *'Snow cutting eve through'* and *'Walked ten miles to cut you buggers out'* (both from Foxhouse), until we linked the graffiti to Tom Midgeley's biography, illustrated with a photograph of 'snow-cutting on the Wolds' (Beckett 2000: 181). After snow had drifted, the High Wolds farms literally had to be 'cut out' by relief teams from other farms.

Alongside these written comments are sketches of the work these men should have been undertaking (fig. 6). The way in which this work is depicted – gathered stooks and detailed depictions of horses in harness at Foxhouse, symmetrical pikes (thatched stacks) and idealised ploughs carved into the stable door at Towthorpe – suggest that they took great pride in this labour and were annoyed by its delay. The drawings are, in a way, an archaeology of wet weather; an archaeology of frustration. They may also have functioned as a way of teaching others about the outcome of that work. The perfect pike silhouettes were symbols of skill and pride on any farm, particularly for the waggoners, whose job included the duty of being able to 'stack, thack and carry barley'. These buildings were therefore the spaces in which the younger lads learned about different aspects of their craft, as well as the proper way of doing things.

The dated comments about the weather created an informal record of seasonality, which could be commented on and referred to, in later years. It also implicitly conveyed the hardships faced by the horselads. In working environments where physical labour dominates daily experience, popular songs and aphorisms seldom refer directly to discomfort, pain or boredom; instead, they tend to convey the qualities of hardiness and fortitude, by which such labourers got by (Howkins and Merricks 1991). In their own way, the inscriptions and cartoons spoke to future generations of horselads about the qualities of pride and skill which were valued within these communities.

Dates and stratigraphic relationships

The earliest graffiti are from Burdale, dated 1872, though most of the dates range between the 1900s and 1930s, reflecting the considerable continuity not only in farming but also in social practice throughout this period (Caunce 1991b). By recording the stratigraphy of images and texts, relative sequences can also be observed for the undated graffiti, suggesting a long sequence of inscriptions and additions. Different layers have been identified by the use of different media. For example, at Burdale, larger, cruder images and tallies in red pencil underlie written comments in graphite (fig. 7). Here, we may be looking at the transition from a non-literate working class to school-leavers at the age of 13 or 14 years old, who had mastered the basics of literacy. Although some horselads in the late nineteenth century may have benefited from the educational campaigns of reformers such as Mary Simpson (1861) of Boynton (‘preacher to the ploughboys’), the 1870 Education Act greatly improved literacy across the Wolds. One of the later texts at Burdale includes

an acrostic poem, and there is growing evidence of both wit and humour in some of the texts and sketches, from the 1920s onwards. Some of the latest graffiti in these granaries includes names of football teams and depictions of jets, made by the children of farmers in the 1960s and 1970s. This stratigraphy is also telling us about the ways in which different generations were reading and responding to the graffiti of their predecessors, by annotating or – in some cases – erasing it.

The horselads' hierarchy and social mobility

At a basic level, graffiti essentially states 'I was here', but in the Wolds, it was also clearly a statement of who you were, relative to others. One of the most common pieces of graffiti is a rollcall of the horselads: a dated list of names, recorded against their working role or title, representing their hierarchy of skill, experience and prowess. At the top of the list, in some instances, is the name of the foreman or hind, who organised the schedule of work on the farm and whose wife kept the hind house (fig. 8). Underneath him was the 'Wag' or 'Waggoner': the most accomplished, experienced and physically strong horselad. Third in line was 'Thoddy' or 'Thirdy', followed by 'Fowat' or 'Fourther' (fourth), 'Fiver' (fifth) and so on (Caunce 1991a: 46, Hayfield 1994: 12). At the end of the list was the 'Wag Lad' or 'Least Lad', who assisted the Waggoner, and bore the brunt of the teasing of the older men. On larger farms, another man, nicknamed 'Tommy Owt' was generally designated to help with the horses, but filled in for sick or incapacitated stockmen or labourers elsewhere on the farm, as the need arose (Caunce 1991a: 47).

This hierarchy informed every aspect of the horselads' lives, both in the field and the farmhouse. From the oral archives and contemporary photographs, it is evident that it successfully kept order amongst the lower men: it determined who got the best plough teams and the order in which they saddled up and rode out to the fields. It also prescribed the order of ploughing, since they used the foxhunting style, working in order, one behind the other, in a staggered line (Caunce 1991a: 74). In the evening, it was the order in which men stabled their teams, washed at the sink and sat down to eat. It even informed the arrangements in the dormitory, determining who slept alongside each other (Caunce 1991a: 83-4). The graffiti hierarchies were part of the way in which these relationships were acknowledge and reaffirmed.

At the Martinmas hiring fairs, the horselads either expected to be offered a higher position by the farmer (if their work was satisfactory) or else sought a better role on a new farm, to broaden their experience of different soils, crops and working methods. This may explain the tendency to date such hierarchies, as it was an informal record of their progress within and between the farms: something which would inevitably outlast their stint, but which could be re-read in later years by others and added to. The graffiti have great potential to be linked successfully to Estate records, to trace the movements of individuals across their careers. Occasionally, we have been able to successfully link a name with a face: Herbert Watson is depicted proudly holding a horse in a photograph dated to the 1900s (Hayfield 1988: 16, Plate 31), but we also have his signature, inscribed on the granary wall at Burdale, recording his rise to Waggoner in 1912 (see fig. 8). We have also found family

relations recorded in the hierarchies, as brothers, cousins and sons took up places on farms where their relatives had met with success. From the oral history, we know that one of the most important recommendations for a farm was the quality of the food provided for the young lads: the hind's reputation could be ruined by hiring fair gossip which suggested his wife kept a mean or 'bad meat house' (Caunce 1991a: 143)! Contemporary ploughsongs such as 'Yorkie Watson' or 'Iron Ned' poked fun at the scrimping and saving of such unscrupulous hinds (Howkins and Merricks 1991: 197):

> 'Well, our owd mester to us did say:
> There's a yowe been dead for a month and day;
> Fetch 'er up, bullocky, fetch her up Sly,
> We'll mek our lads some rare mutton pie.'

Tensions and frustrations

Not everyone rose through the ranks unhindered. The oral archives suggest that physical punishment was common for mistakes or youthful misdemeanours (Caunce 1991a: 79), but bullying was also endemic (Reffold 1984, Beckett 2000). Boys keen to reinforce their position or men who got 'stuck' at the third or fourth level due to a lack of skill, could be brutal with the new lads. Fights were common, though these were usually reserved for the market place at the hiring fair, when long-term scores were settled by lads who had put on a bit more weight and were out seeking revenge on their tormentors (Caunce 1991a: 175). One cartoon at Burdale may refer to such an incident, where a sketch of a prize fighter is annotated with the caption

'This is the lad that'd scrap any man from a stone to a tonne'. Another reads *'Fred Holly to York Assises 1926'*, though the nature of his crime is not made explicit.

The social mobility inherent in the system meant that most lads were patient enough to weather the hierarchy, but some did leave the farm before the year end. We initially misinterpreted the comment *'Brandy gone to the hay country'* as a euphemism for a favourite horse who had passed over to the 'elysian fields'. However, broader reading of the biographies of the horselads revealed that the 'Hay country' was the district around Leeds, where lucrative seasonal work could be picked up by untenured labourers. The graffiti may therefore refer to a horselad who had fallen out with his waggoner or foreman and left the farm. Leaving at this time of the year was a drastic measure, since the men were only paid at Martinmas, when they could clear their debts and enjoy a week of relative freedom. The oral histories indicate that horselads who left prior to this date were rarely successful in prosecuting farmers to recoup some of their pay, since they were considered to have broken the terms of their employment (Caunce 1991a: 31).

Social relationships

As we have already argued, both the hierarchy of the horselads and status within the broader household, was powerfully reproduced through the architecture of the farm and the spaces in which people worked, socialised and slept. The use of nominally agricultural buildings such as stables or granaries as well as kitchens and warming rooms, for socialising in the

evenings and at weekends, is attested in contemporary autobiographies (Kitchen 1983). The act of inscription, reading and addition to the graffiti helped reinforced this sense of a tightly-knit community, from whom more casual or seasonal labourers and women were generally excluded.

The graffiti provide glimpses of the ways in which the men spent their limited free time, as well as wet weather. A meal-bin lid at Towthorpe has been carved into a Merills Board (fig. 9), and the game appears identical to one found inscribed on a stone from the medieval village of Wharram Percy (Hayfield, pers.comm.). There are affectionate cartoons of the animals with which they shared their working lives, such as the small dog named *'Pup'* and witty poem about a *'Setter'* at Foxhouse. There are several fine drawings of horses, either focusing on their heads or showing them in full plough-gear. At Burdale, the only place where shepherds are noted in one of the hierarchies, we also have several silhouettes of sheep. The young mens' drawings were evidently meant to impress and entertain their fellows: one cartoon at Foxhouse recalls the breaking of a speed record by a motorbike, whilst another depicts a grocer's van delivering goods on the Wolds, with the eponymous name *'I. Feedam'* emblazoned on its side.

In these rooms then, men boasted of their skills and the strength and beauty of their horses, complained about the weather, played traditional board games and sang: 'it was a poor gawk who couldn't knock a tune out of a mouth organ or give a song to pass away the evening' (Kitchen 1983: 59-60). This may explain the presence of verses, snatches of songs and rude rhymes,

throughout our case studies. Indeed these places were as significant as the Hiring Fair and Ploughstott Plays, in providing liminal spaces within the farm, in which the contemporary norms and morals of society might be challenged or temporarily inverted (Howkins and Merricks 1991). Moses (1999) has argued that although there is little formal evidence of organised, proletarian identity amongst East Riding farm servants, such informal activities may represent an emerging sense of socio-political consciousness and mutual solidarity. These processes are also evident in farm servants' membership of Primitive Methodist communities and Friendly Societies (Neave 1991).

In contrast, other spaces in the farm were used by more itinerant labourers, with a less defined communal identity and security of tenure. In the 'bothy' or 'slum' set-aside for the seasonal workers at Burdale in 1929 (Hayfield 1988: 16), a series of tallies and sums have been carved or written onto a wooden board by the stairs. This graffiti probably represents the day or piecework reckonings of these itinerant labourers. Uniquely, the main granary room at Burdale does include a hierarchy in which the names of a shepherd and his lad are also recorded (both notably listed below the 'least lad'), and more rarely, one hierarchy also includes names of female servants on the farm.

Throughout the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a clear reluctance, amongst farmers and their workers to employ women as labourers on the farm (Whetham 1978: 80-1). The only roles they considered acceptable were those of farmhouse servants although at particular points of the year such as harvest, and during the labour shortages engendered by the

First and Second World Wars, women were clearly present on the farm. Otherwise, contact with members of the opposite sex was remote and infrequent: separate stairs, attic accommodation (sometimes strengthened by barred windows) and the watchful eye of the farmers, prevented early liaisons. Interestingly, the lack of suitable accommodation for women was cited by farmers in the Wolds as a reason not to employ Land Army girls in the First World War (Howorth 2002: 87).

Across the north, the 'living-in' system resulted in retarded marriage rates (Short 2000: 1245). Courting was actively discouraged on the farm and could become the grounds of dismissal, especially for the female servants (Caunce 1991a: 167). It is therefore not surprising that women and sex occupied the idle thoughts of many horselads, and that this subject matter is prevalent in the graffiti. Interestingly, it was often hidden away at the back of the barn, as at Foxhouse, and was restricted to one of the granary rooms at Burdale (fig. *). Some of it consists of rude or crude rhymes, such as this one from Foxhouse:

'Here's health to those that drink whisky, here's health to those that drink wine, here's health to the prettiest lady, who fixed up her belly to mine!'

These verses were clearly part of the shared song culture, since at Burdale all that was needed was the first line of this poem, trailing off into a series of suggestive dots…! An inventive acrostic poem in the same barn explicitly alludes to the colloquial phrase for female genitalia, whilst many of the

cartoons are visually explicit. Some of these illustrations may be pornographic: they certainly concern male prowess, knowledge and bravado, and some are aggressive in their intentions. But they may also have served an important didactic function, especially for the younger lads. At Foxhouse for example, a naked man and woman are depicted facing each other: the glowingly pregnant form of the woman in the next frame reveals the consequences of their liaison (fig. 10)!

Interestingly, many of these more explicit cartoons are scratched or scrubbed out and defaced, at a later date. Despite their reluctance, many farmers were forced to take on Land Army Girls in the Second, if not the First World War. The names of two such women – *Edna Scott and Iris Faulkner* – are inscribed onto the walls of Foxhouse, and it is possible that their arrival into these once exclusively male working spaces, was the occasion for self-censorship by the remaining horselads or other farm workers.

The impact of the First and Second World Wars

The First World War had an inevitable and dramatic impact on these farming communities, mainly due to the loss of both men and horses. Colonel Mark Sykes of the Sledmere Estate founded the Waggoners' Reserves in the years preceding the war, and many men who gladly took Sykes' pound found themselves unexpectedly called up to act as carters and carriers to the Front (Caunce 1991a: 206). Letters home spoke of the great distress of the men, at the suffering of injured and dying horses (Howorth 2002: 45). The blood-stock of these Shire and Clydesdale lineages never fully recovered. The 1920s

were marked by economic depression and agricultural crises, making life difficult for young men struggling to find a position on the farms, alongside soldiers returning from the war. Perhaps this is why many of the hierarchies date from 1915-1930: at the Front, the traditional hierarchy had broken down, since the horselads shared the same rank, dress and responsibilities (Howorth 2002: 37). However, they were part of a much larger military hierarchy which reminded them of the importance of maintaining status and difference. On their return, the graffiti hierarchies may have been an important mechanism through which their traditional authority was re-established. It also reveals the relatively small impact of mechanisation on these farms between 1918 and the agricultural depression of 1929 (Whetham 1970, 1978: 204-6).

During the Second World War, soldiers stationed in nearby barracks were drafted in to help with harvest, in the place of missing labourers. This may explain the presence of one '*Sgt. Carr 5th lancers*' who inscribed his name and rank at Foxhouse. The oral histories record the how these men were shocked by the working and living conditions of the horselads, and were the subject of much mockery and humour (Howorth 2002: 88). However, when such men entered the granaries and barns, or horselads returned to the farms from the Front, they inevitably brought their memories and experiences with them. Their graffiti consists of things they had seen, such as a landing craft, carved into the back of the stable door at Towthorpe or the barrage balloon at Burdale. However, there are also more humorous cartoons, such as the big-eared Kaiser, complete with spiked helmet, drawn on the wall at Foxhouse. There are also more bitter social commentaries, such as the insulting

depiction of a Sgt. Major figure, with greased and parted hair, pig-like nose and sharp teeth, whose uniformed breast is decorated with a row of circular medals and one cross, spelling out the visual pun (fig. 11):

‘**P R I † K’**

These buildings were the spaces in which men worked out their anger, dealt with their feelings and reflected on their past. It is also a snapshot of the unintended consequences of changes brought about by the war. The names of the Land Army girls are annotated with an arrow which asks:

‘*Edna Scott – where is she now?*

Write answer in box below.’

No-one has ever replied to this appeal, but her contribution to both the working and social life on the farm was evidently missed, long after the end of the war.

Mechanisation

The disappearance of these communities began in the aftermath of the First World War, but as has already been noted, the relatively late appearance of mechanisation on the Wolds delayed its fragmentation. Oral reminiscences recall how some of the first styles of tractor tried to mimic the relationship between horselad and horse (Whetham 1978: 206). Unfamiliarity with the turning circles of these machines led to damaged hedges and foldyard walls,

and even in the 1930s there was considerable debate about the relative merits of machines versus with horse-teams (Whetham 1978: 207). At Wharram Percy, we have a unique insight into the way in which the horselads took on and coped with these new arrangements. Alongside the traditional lists of names and dates, there is a new hierarchy of tractor drivers dated 1941. The Boss and Wag are listed, but thoddy, fourther and fiver are replaced with the new titles of '*Tractor Driver'* listed in order of seniority and – presumably – priority of access to the new machine (fig. 12). These men were coping with the impact of new technology and the transformations this wrought in their identity and status, through the use of familiar and established protocols.

6. Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that an integrated approach to the domestic and agricultural buildings of the historic farmstead has the potential to shed light, not only on farming processes, but also the social structures and the organisation of labour, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We have focused on one particular area of social practice which has often been neglected by historical archaeologists, namely the inscription of 'graffiti'. Through our contextual analysis of its location, character and content, we have argued that it was mainly the work of the horselads of the Wolds: a distinct and tightly-knit group of young men, whose identity was defined by a strong internal hierarchy and the annual hiring system.

The graffiti provide an unparalleled insight into their working and social life, as well as the broader communities to which they belonged, since it was made at the time of those experiences, rather than being mediated through the reflections and memories of older age. Moreover, it touches on issues and emotions which – in their more senior years – the horselads may not have felt comfortable writing about in person, or articulating to an interviewer: overt pride in one's skill, anger and regret, frustration, sex and humour. It embodies the raw and passionate responses of adolescents to difficult living and working conditions, restrictions imposed by the system of living-in, and changes in technology and the economy which threatened both their jobs and their sense of self and place. In particular, we have suggested that the graffiti was itself a medium through which their sense of group identity was negotiated and (re)constructed throughout this period. These intimate settings, inscribed with the traces of knife blade and pencil, can therefore be seen as the locales in which the lives of individual social agents intersected with much broader historical structures and events.

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